



## Reporting Child Neglect and Abuse in Washington

The true extent of child abuse and neglect is not completely known. During 2002, Washington's Child Protective Services (CPS) received **79,000** referrals and investigated **37,300** instances of reported child abuse and neglect.

- ✓ Physical neglect (**49%**) accounts for most referrals to CPS, physical abuse 33%, sexual abuse or exploitation 10%, medical or prenatal neglect 5%, and emotional abuse 3%.
- ✓ Rates for accepted children are higher for preschool (birth to 5) and school children (ages 6-12), and drop by half in adolescent years (ages 13-17).

### Who are mandated reporters?

Social service counselors, employees of the Department of Social and Health Services, juvenile probation officer, placement and liaison specialist, responsible living skills program staff, HOPE center staff, or state family and children's ombudsman or any volunteer in the ombudsman's office, licensed or certified child care providers and their employees, professional school personnel, registered and licensed nurses, psychologist, pharmacist, law enforcement officers, medical examiners and county coroners.

### What are your responsibilities?

Under the law (RCW 26.44.030) people should report when it appears there is reasonable cause to believe that a child, legally defined as a person under the age of 18, has been non-accidentally physically or mentally injured, neglected or sexually abused.

**Anyone** suspecting child abuse has the right and responsibility to report it.

The report must be made at the first opportunity, but in no case longer than 48 hours after there is reasonable cause to believe that the child has suffered abuse or neglect. The report must include the identity of the accused if known.

### What is the legal definition of child abuse and neglect?

"Child abuse or neglect shall mean the injury, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child by any person under circumstances which indicate that the child's health, welfare and safety is harmed thereby." (RCW 26.44.020)

### Negligence is further defined:

"Negligent treatment or maltreatment shall mean an act or omission which evidences a serious disregard of consequences of such magnitude as to constitute a clear and present danger to the child's health, welfare and safety." (RCW 26.44.020)

### What are the types of abuse and neglect?

There are generally four categories: Neglect, Physical, Emotional and Sexual Abuse. Neglect includes emotional, physical and medical neglect.

**If you have medical questions about child abuse...**

The University of Washington, under contract with the Division of Children and Family Services provides no-cost consultation and training services through a statewide network of practicing physicians. Services are available to Child Protective Services, Law Enforcement, Prosecuting Attorneys, Doctors and other health providers. The network provides a statewide, toll free phone number: **1-800-326-5300**.

**If you are in doubt about what should be reported...**

Whenever there is doubt in a particular case, whether it should be reported or not, the circumstances of the case should be discussed with Child Protective Services or law enforcement. A final determination can then be made, following consultation, as to which circumstances should be formally reported.

Remember that you have a legal responsibility to report child abuse to Child Protective Services or the police when you have *reasonable cause* to believe abuse has occurred. Simply reporting the abuse to your supervisor does not fulfill your legal responsibility. A report must be made.

**What Information is Necessary to Report?**

Oral or written reports to CPS or the appropriate law enforcement agency must contain the following information if known:

1. The name, address and age of the child;
2. The name and address of the child's parent or guardians or other persons having custody of the child;
3. The nature and extent of the injuries, neglect and/or sexual abuse;
4. Any evidence of previous incidences of abuse or neglect including their nature and extent;
5. Any other information which may be helpful in establishing the cause of the child's injury or injuries, neglect or death and the identity of the perpetrator or perpetrators.

**If a crime has been committed law enforcement must be notified.**

**Note:** The name of the person making the report is not a requirement of the law. The Department of Social and Health Services encourages responsible reporting and will receive reports with an offer of limited confidentiality. Names of confidential reporters may be released when ordered by the court or as necessary to protect the child or comply with agency rule and policy.

**Any** person who in good faith makes a report or gives testimony in regard to possible child neglect or abuse is immune from civil or criminal liability. Any administrator of a hospital or similar institution or licensed physician taking a child into custody, such as a hospital hold is warranted, is also immune from liability (RCW 26.44.056).

**How to Report Child Abuse and Neglect in Washington****CALL -- DSHS Child Protective Services Statewide Hotline Number 1-800-562-5624**

If you believe that DSHS has not responded adequately to your initial report, contact a CPS supervisor or manager with your concern or the DSHS Office of Constituent Relations for the Children's Administration at **Children's Administration, Office of Constituent Relations: 1-800-723-4831**

If you believe the supervisor, manager or Office of Constituent Relations has not responded adequately to your concern, contact the independent **Office of Family and Children Ombudsman** at **1-800-571-7321** or **(206) 439-3870**.

**Please tell 2 friends about child neglect and abuse.  
Tell them how to identify it and how to report it.**